

WP3 -Joint Training programme for Social, Cultural, and Health Sectors

Module 5

DOCUMENT PRODUCED BY: RightChallenge

Module Overview

Module 5	Communication and Socio-emotional Skills Development for Implementing Theatre Activities with Older Persons
Module summary / main contents	Module 5 focuses on developing communication and socio-emotional skills that facilitate the implementation of theatre activities with older adults. This module is designed to enhance participants' abilities in both verbal and non-verbal communication, helping them to express thoughts clearly and respond sensitively to the different needs of older individuals. The module focuses on the importance of empathy, adaptability, and active listening. Through the introduction of practical activities, including storytelling, mirroring exercise, and emotional role-playing scenarios, participants build their skills in listening, expressing emotions, and promoting a supportive group dynamic. To improve verbal, non-verbal and socio-emotional skills from home, each chapter includes two solo-exercises who can be done individually. By the end of Module 5, participants will be equipped with different tools to create inclusive and engaging theatre experiences that promote social connection, emotional well-being, and self-expression among older adults.
Timetable & schedule [4h in total]	• (50 Min.): Presentation with introduction of the module, objectives, key definitions and concepts, techniques, tips, exercises and activities • (15 Min.): Multimedia Resources within the presentation • (40 Min.): Six practical solo-exercises to do at home individually (presentation slides)

	• (30 Min.): Implementation of Active Learning Group Activity #1 – The Story Circle • (30 Min.): Implementation of Active Learning Group Activity #2 – The Mirroring Game • (50 Min.): Implementation of Active Learning Group Activity #3 – Emotional Role-Playing Scenarios • (25 Min.): Final Quiz with various questions about the topic
Learning outcomes of the module	• Improve Skills: (1) Explore ways to improve and develop effective verbal and non-verbal communication techniques. (2) Enhance socio-emotional skills to better engage participants in theatrical activities. (3) Provide guidance on facilitating group discussions, promoting teamwork, and encouraging the active participation of older adults. • Provide Knowledge: (1) Definitions and key concepts of verbal communication, non-verbal communication, and socio-emotional skills. (2) Provide activities and exercises to improve verbal and non-verbal communication skills, as well as socio-emotional skills, in both group settings and for individual practice at home.

On Stage in the Golden Age: Theatre for Healthy Ageing

Welcome to Module 5:

Communication and Socio-emotional Skills Development for Implementing Theatre Activities with Older Persons

Introduction and Overview

Module 5 is designed to build essential communication and socio-emotional skills for individuals who facilitate theatre activities with older adults. This module provides practical guidance and knowledge for caregivers, social and mental health professionals, artists, and anyone interested in learning how to support older adults (65+) in creative settings.

Module 5 is designed to enhance participants' abilities in both verbal and non-verbal communication, helping them to express thoughts clearly and respond sensitively to the different needs of older individuals. It focuses on the importance of empathy, adaptability, and active listening. Through the introduction of practical activities, including storytelling, mirroring exercise, and emotional role-playing scenarios, participants build their skills in listening, expressing emotions, and promoting a supportive group dynamic. To improve verbal, non-verbal and socio-emotional skills from home, each chapter includes two solo-exercises who can be done individually.

By the end of Module 5, participants will be equipped with different tools to create inclusive and engaging theater experiences that promote social connection, emotional well-being, and self-expression among older adults.

Objectives and Learning Outcomes

The objectives of Module 5 focus on equipping participants with essential skills, knowledge, and strategies for engaging older adults through theatre. This module supports several target groups, including caregivers and mental health professionals working with aging adults who are interested in incorporating theatre into care services. It also targets artists and cultural facilitators who engage older adults through theatrical activities and seek skills to create a supportive, inclusive environment, as well as learners interested in theatre-based approaches for older adults, aiming to develop communication and socio-emotional skills.

Module 5 provides tools to explore effective communication techniques, both verbal and non-verbal, that are important for connecting with older adults during group activities. It aims to enhance socio-emotional skills such as empathy, patience, and adaptability to promote stronger engagement and positive interactions during theatre activities. The module offers strategies to improve group dynamics, enabling participants to lead discussions, encourage teamwork, and promote active participation among older adults.

Additionally, Module 5 aims to provide knowledge about concepts and definitions regarding verbal communication, non-verbal communication, and socio-emotional skills. Complementing these foundational ideas, it includes several exercises designed to build these skills in both group and also an individual context at home, empowering facilitators to improve and meet the emotional and communicative needs of themselves and older adults.

The Importance of Communication and Socio-Emotional Skills in Theatre Interventions with Older Adults

Theatre-based interventions can play an important role in reducing social isolation and loneliness, supporting healthy aging, and strengthening social cognition in older adults (McDonald et al., 2024). Active participation in theatre also enhances empathy, social communication, tolerance, and social interactions, providing a way to promote and improve social connections (Lewandowska & Węziak-Białowska, 2023).

However, the benefits of these interventions are not limited to the participants alone but extend to those conducting the activities. To support older adults, educators, theatre practitioners, and professionals, they must develop their own communication and social-emotional skills. This module introduces both verbal and non-verbal communication techniques, along with practical activities that can be practiced individually or in group settings.

Creating a sense of trust and comfort, facilitating emotional expression, and adapting to the different needs and abilities of older adults are essential skills for engaging them in theatre. Small adjustments in communication style can make a big difference in improving social connections within the group, while also building confidence in one's ability to express themselves.

Informed by the AGE_THEA focus group results, this module highlights the importance of effective training for professionals working with older adults through theatre. Essential communication skills like active listening, interactive engagement, and even incorporating humour are necessary, along with emotional management skills, to ensure healthy relationships and positive interactions. Without these foundational skills, professionals may struggle to connect with participants, particularly with older adults

experiencing cognitive challenges such as dementia or Alzheimer's. Module 5 of the AGE_THEA training programme aims to provide orientation to create a safe environment by enhancing and developing communication and socio-emotional skills and to offer some tools and techniques to address these challenges, ensuring that theatre interventions can be more impactful, inclusive, and supportive for all participants.

Verbal Communication in Theatre Activities

When we think about communication, verbal exchanges often come to mind, such as listening to a friend, calling a family member, or conversing with a colleague. Verbal communication skills are essential for engaging participants in theatre activities and ensuring positive outcomes.

Verbal communication can be defined as "human interaction through the use of words or messages in linguistic form." Colloquially, this refers to speech, particularly in face-to-face settings, while academically, it includes mediated forms, written communication, and sometimes even sign language (Oxford Reference).

Key components of effective verbal communication include clarity, tone and sounds, pace, meaning, and the expression of thoughts, ideas, feelings, or needs. It also involves the use of symbols and the relationship between the sender and receiver. Adaptability in communication is particularly important when engaging with older adults.

Following this definition, verbal communication encompasses the use of words and written messages to express ideas, thoughts or feelings. Clarity is central for communication. Ensuring that language is clear and easy to understand helps prevent misunderstandings. The spoken tone can add emotional context, significantly influencing how messages are perceived and

interpreted by others. Additionally, the pace at which we speak can affect understanding, particularly for older adults, who may require a slower pace to fully comprehend information.

It is important to consider who you are communicating with and how well they can hear and understand the language used, especially when expressing complex thoughts or emotions. The relationship between the sender and receiver is central to successful communication, as effective interaction depends on both parties' ability to connect and understand each other's intentions, thus minimising misunderstandings.

Especially when working with older adults, adaptability is crucial, as adjustments in tone, speed, and simplicity can influence their understanding and engagement in theatre activities. Empathy and patience are essential in creating a supportive, respectful, and inclusive environment where participants feel respected, understood, and fully included in interactions, which enhances their participation, enjoyment, and overall well-being.

Techniques for Effective Verbal Communication

To enhance verbal communication in theatre activities, several key techniques can be useful. First, it is essential to listen actively and summarise what has been communicated. This involves paying close attention to the speaker, focusing fully on their words, and clarifying their message by paraphrasing key points to ensure understanding.

Additionally, using open questions encourages the dialogue and allows participants to express themselves better. When providing responses, especially if they are critical, it is important to offer constructive feedback that focuses on improvement rather than criticism.

Listening to verbal communication messages with an open mind is also fundamental; this approach helps to create a safe environment where participants feel valued and respected. Sometimes it is equally important to withhold judgment during conversations, especially when we do not agree on a certain opinion, as this promotes trust and openness.

Finally, using simple and clear language is important, particularly when working with older adults. Using straightforward terminology helps ensure that messages are easily understood and promotes positive interactions within theatre activities. By incorporating these techniques, facilitators can significantly improve their communication skills and enhance the overall experience for participants.

Solo Exercises for Enhancing Verbal Communication Skills

Two effective solo exercises can help individuals improve their verbal communication skills. The first exercise is Reading Aloud with Emphasis. In this activity, participants select a passage from a book or article and read it aloud, experimenting with various tones, paces, and volumes. By emphasising different words or phrases, they can alter the emotion expressed through the text. This practice not only builds vocal variety but also improves clear enunciation and expressive communication, which are essential for engaging others verbally in theatre activities.

The second exercise is Daily Reflection Out Loud. Participants can choose a topic, such as a favorite memory or a recent experience, and speak about it out loud for five minutes. The focus here is on organising thoughts clearly and using a variety of descriptive words to vividly express details. This practice helps build clarity and confidence in verbal expression, which is particularly helpful for effective communication in group settings. By regularly engaging

in these exercises, individuals can develop their ability to articulate thoughts and feelings more effectively and improve their interactions with others.

Active Learning Activity in a Group Setting #1 – The Story Circle

The Story Circle is a dynamic group activity designed to improve communication skills and improve creativity. In this exercise, participants sit in a circle and take turns adding a line to a collective story. The primary objective of the activity is to listen carefully to each contribution, connect ideas, and build upon what others have shared, creating a cohesive narrative. This activity significantly improves listening skills, as participants must pay close attention to one another to maintain the flow of the story. Additionally, it encourages clear articulation, allowing individuals to express their thoughts creatively. By engaging in this collaborative storytelling process, participants also develop their creative storytelling abilities, an essential skill in theatre contexts. This exercise not only promotes a sense of community and collaboration but also provides a fun and engaging way to enhance verbal communication.

Non-Verbal Communication in Theatre Activities

Non-verbal communication is a fundamental aspect when you would like to enhance interaction and understanding, particularly when working with older individuals. While verbal communication relies on spoken words, non-verbal signals include a wide range of cues that can impact communication outcomes. Many older adults may face specific challenges, such as hearing loss or cognitive difficulties, which can hinder their ability to engage in verbal exchanges. Therefore, understanding and effectively using non-verbal communication becomes essential in these contexts.

Non-verbal communication is defined as the transfer of information from one person to another without the use of words or spoken language. It can manifest in various forms, including facial expressions, body language, and even tone of voice (Encyclopaedia Britannica). Key components of non-verbal communication include laughter, crying, gestures, body posture, facial expressions, eye contact, personal space, tactile signals, olfactory signals, tone variations, or dramatic pauses. Each of these elements contributes to the emotional landscape of communication, allowing individuals to express thoughts and feelings beyond words. For example, facial expressions can show a range of emotions, helping to clarify the intent behind an action, while body language can indicate openness, encouragement, or support, which is especially impactful in engaging older adults in theatre activities.

Older adults or those with cognitive impairments may rely more heavily on visual cues for understanding, making clarity in non-verbal communication especially important when expressing thoughts, emotions, or intentions. Successful non-verbal communication helps that intentions are correctly understood and prevents miscommunication. During activities non-verbal strategies like mirroring emotions and demonstrating openness are essential to connect and engage with the participants. Mirroring emotions helps to validate feelings, creating a sense of empathy and encouragement. Demonstrating openness through relaxed body language and gentle eye contact creates a safe and inviting environment and helps to build trust and empower older people to participate more freely in creative expression.

Techniques for Effective Non-verbal Communication

Non-verbal communication techniques are essential for engaging older adults in theatre activities. One important approach is to use gestures and facial expressions to reinforce verbal instructions and enhance understanding, particularly for participants with hearing impairments. Clear, expressive gestures can help pass messages more effectively and ensure that everyone is on the same page.

Another technique is to adapt your posture and body language to show openness. Maintaining gentle eye contact not only shows attentiveness but also helps build trust and connection with participants. Additionally, using mirroring allows facilitators to reflect the emotions and gestures of participants. It is also vital to adjust distance and personal space according to the comfort levels of older adults. Being sensitive to their preferences can make participants feel more comfortable. Employing pauses or moments of silence provides participants with the time they need to reflect and respond.

Finally, facilitators should be mindful of the pacing of movements and gestures. Slow movements can help older adults process information more effectively, while varying the tempo can add a dynamic element to exercises.

Solo Exercises for Enhancing Verbal Communication Skills

Two effective solo exercises can improve non-verbal communication skills. The first exercise is a Facial Expression Practice. In this activity, participants stand in front of a mirror and practice expressing various emotions such as happiness, sadness, surprise, and anger, only using their facial expressions. Spending a minute on each emotion allows individuals to notice the subtle changes in their features and how those changes can communicate different feelings. This exercise enhances awareness of facial cues and improves the

ability to express emotions without relying on words, making it a perfect tool for engaging others non-verbally.

The second exercise is the Body Language Journal. Participants are encouraged to keep a journal for one week, documenting daily interactions while focusing on the non-verbal cues they observe in themselves and others. This reflective practice invites individuals to analyse how body language, gestures, and facial expressions influence their interactions. By being mindful of these cues, participants can develop a deeper insight into how non-verbal signals affect their communication and relationships.

Active Learning Activity in a Group Setting #2 – The Mirroring Game

In the Mirroring Game, participants work in pairs to enhance their understanding of non-verbal communication. One participant takes the lead while the other follows and mirrors their movements and expressions. The leader uses gestures, facial expressions, and body language to express a range of emotions or actions, allowing the follower to practice reflecting those signals accurately. After a few minutes of mirroring, participants switch roles, giving each person the opportunity to lead and follow. This exercise is designed to help participants become more aware of non-verbal cues and better understand how body language communicates emotions and intentions.

Socio-emotional Skills Development in Theatre Activities

Socio-emotional skills facilitate interactions during theatre activities and promote the overall well-being of participants, particularly older individuals. Socio-emotional skills, also referred to as socio-emotional competencies, include a broad range of abilities that support emotional intelligence, social interaction, and self-regulation. This includes social skills such as cooperation

and empathy, motivational qualities like self-control and resilience, and personality traits such as conscientiousness and emotional stability (Frontiers in Psychology).

Important socio-emotional skills relevant to theatre activities include confidence, conflict resolution, verbal communication, empathy, and the ability to understand others' emotions. Additionally, qualities like integrity, self-awareness, emotional self-regulation, patience, encouragement, and leadership skills are essential for building healthy relationships and managing conflicts. For instance, patience and empathy allow facilitators and participants to connect positively, while self-awareness helps individuals recognise and manage their thoughts and feelings. Together, these skills establish trust, encourage engagement, and create a safe space for self-expression and creativity within theatre.

It is important to note that older individuals may face unique challenges in emotional self-expression due to age-related cognitive changes, sensory impairments, or physical health limitations. Psychological challenges such as grief, social isolation, and shifts in independence can complicate their ability to process and communicate emotions. Recognising these challenges in theatre settings is important for creating a supportive environment that supports self-expression and emotional well-being.

Techniques for Developing Socio-Emotional Skills

To cultivate socio-emotional skills during theatre activities, several techniques can be used. First, it is essential to show empathy towards participants, creating a supportive atmosphere where they feel safe to experience, manage, and express their emotions. This empathetic approach helps participants feel

valued and understood and creates a deeper emotional connection to the activities.

Flexibility is also crucial; facilitators should remain adaptable to the emotional needs of participants throughout the activities. This means being responsive to the different emotional states of individuals and adjusting the pace or focus of the activities as needed. Facilitators can also engage in discussions about potential strategies for handling challenging emotions that may arise during these activities.

Encouraging participants to recognise and acknowledge their emotions is another important technique. This practice allows individuals to share their feelings without fear of judgment. By validating their emotions and experiences, facilitators express openness, which is essential for promoting positive interactions and connections among participants.

Solo Exercises for Enhancing Socio-emotional Skills

Two effective solo exercises can enhance socio-emotional skills, promoting self-awareness and emotional regulation. The first exercise is maintaining a Gratitude Journal. Participants are encouraged to write down one or two things they are thankful for each day. Alongside each entry, they should reflect on why they appreciate these aspects and how these reflections make them feel. This practice improves positive thinking, a deeper understanding of personal emotions, self-awareness and emotional regulation.

The second exercise is the Mindfulness Meditation. Participants should set aside 10 to 15 minutes to practice mindfulness. During this time, they focus on their breath, observe their thoughts, and acknowledge their feelings without judgment. This exercise enhances self-awareness and emotional regulation, allowing individuals to develop patience and a better

understanding of their emotional reactions. By practicing mindfulness regularly, participants can learn to respond to their emotions more thoughtfully, which can lead to improved emotional well-being. To support this practice, calming music can be incorporated, helping to create a peaceful environment conducive to meditation.

Active Learning Activity in a Group Setting #3– Emotional Role-Playing Scenarios

In the Emotional Role-Playing Scenario activity, participants engage in an exercise designed to improve their socio-emotional skills through real-life situations. To begin, the facilitator divides participants into small groups or selects volunteers. Each group or volunteer is then assigned a scenario that involves a conflict or emotional challenge, such as a disagreement between friends or the task of giving constructive feedback on social behaviour. As participants role-play the assigned scenarios, they focus on employing empathy and effective communication strategies to resolve the situation and work towards a compromise. This approach allows individuals to practice expressing emotions and responding thoughtfully, which are essential components of conflict resolution. During or after the role-play, the facilitator leads a discussion about the feelings and responses observed throughout the activity. Participants are encouraged to reflect on their experiences, emotional dynamics and techniques used. This debriefing session is crucial for gathering insights and create a greater emotional understanding among participants.

Applications of Communication and Socio–Emotional Skills in Promoting Well–Being

Theatrical activities are a powerful tool for creating supportive environments that enhance the sense of community and collaboration among older adults. Through participation in group activities, individuals can improve their teamwork skills and train their capacity for empathy, reinforcing social bonds and gaining self–esteem.

The development of socio–emotional skills is particularly beneficial for improving mental health. These skills enable individuals to better understand and manage their emotions, leading to reduced anxiety and stress. By learning to express their feelings more effectively, participants can build healthier relationships, which is essential for emotional well–being. This aspect of connection is important for older adults, who may experience isolation or loneliness in their daily lives. Furthermore, engaging in theatrical exercises not only promotes emotional health but also stimulates cognitive function and creativity. The combination of social interaction, emotional expression, and creative engagement allows older adults to thrive both emotionally and cognitively. Through these applications of communication and socio–emotional skills, theatre becomes a great opportunity for enhancing the quality of life in general.

Tips for Integrating Communication and Socio–emotional Skills into Regular Practice

To integrate communication and socio–emotional skills into theatrical activities, it is important to create a comfortable and open environment where participants feel safe to express themselves without fear of judgment.

Creating an atmosphere of acceptance encourages sharing emotions, which helps to build trust.

Incorporating exercises that promote active listening is fundamental. Facilitate discussions in pairs or conduct group reflections, reminding participants to listen attentively to one another. This practice not only improves their listening skills but also creates a better understanding of others' perspectives.

Using role-playing scenarios provides participants with the opportunity to practice their communication and socio-emotional skills in realistic contexts. This prepares them for real-life interactions while allowing them to explore a range of emotional responses in a safe setting.

Introducing mindfulness exercises before or during theatre activities can further enhance participants' awareness of their emotions and promote emotional regulation. Mindfulness techniques improve focus and emotional clarity.

It's also important to celebrate individual and group achievements, no matter how small. Offering positive feedback boosts confidence and encourages continued participation and growth.

Including physical exercises, such as movement improvisation or expressive dance, helps to improve body awareness and allows participants to connect with their emotions physically.

Finally, after completing activities, hold discussions to reflect on experiences and feelings. Encourage participants to express how they felt during the exercises, reinforcing their emotional understanding and communication skills.

Evaluation and Feedback in Theatre Activities

After exploring various information, tips, and exercise ideas, we would like to emphasise the importance of feedback and evaluation in the development of social and personal skills among participants. To determine whether these skills have improved, several tools are available to facilitators. Regular check-ins, feedback forms, discussions, and informal observations can gather valuable insights into participants’ emotional and cognitive growth. Implementing these reflective practices allows facilitators to assess their teaching methods and make necessary adjustments based on participants’ responses and levels of engagement. Gathered feedback from participants enables facilitators to continuously refine and adapt their approaches and improve their support for older adults.

By ensuring that each participant receives the encouragement and resources they need, facilitators can improve the effectiveness of theatrical activities, promoting well-being and promoting a positive experience for everyone involved.

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“ON STAGE IN THE GOLDEN AGE: THEATRE FOR HEALTHY AGEING”

PROJECT NUMBER: 2023 - 1 - RO01 - KA220 - ADU - 000160973

WEBSITE: <https://age-thea.eu/>

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